

FITNESS JILL BARKER

THEY ARE THE ONES who ignore the call of the couch on the days when taking a load off is easier than pulling on exercise gear

An exercise in discipline

Fitness isn't about looking good in a bikini or impressing the ladies with your big set of guns. Nor is it about a sub-20 minute 5K or the ability to run, swim and bike.

Nope.

The true face of fitness is the regular Joe or Jill who, despite a schedule that says it can't be done, consistently finds an hour most days of the week to work up a sweat.

If you look around your neighbourhood, you'll see some of these champions setting an example for those around them.

They are the ones who ignore the call of the couch on the days when taking a load off is much easier than pulling on the exercise gear. In short, these dedicated men and women, like those listed below, are fitness heroes not because they look good in Lycra, but because they are out there day after day doing what the majority of Canadians don't do—exercise.

The early-morning exerciser

You gotta admire the dedicated souls who are out of bed and on the run before the sun comes up.

In my neighbourhood, they range from a walker who's 60-plus and has a non-sense stride I can spot from 100 metres away to NDP MP Thomas Mulcair, who works off his steady diet of rubber chicken on the campaign trail with a brisk walk most mornings through the streets of Pointe Claire and Beaconsfield.

What makes these men and women so special is not just their early-morning get up and go, but their understanding that *getting their workout* in before life (and politics) gets in the way is one of the most successful strategies in making fitness a regular habit.

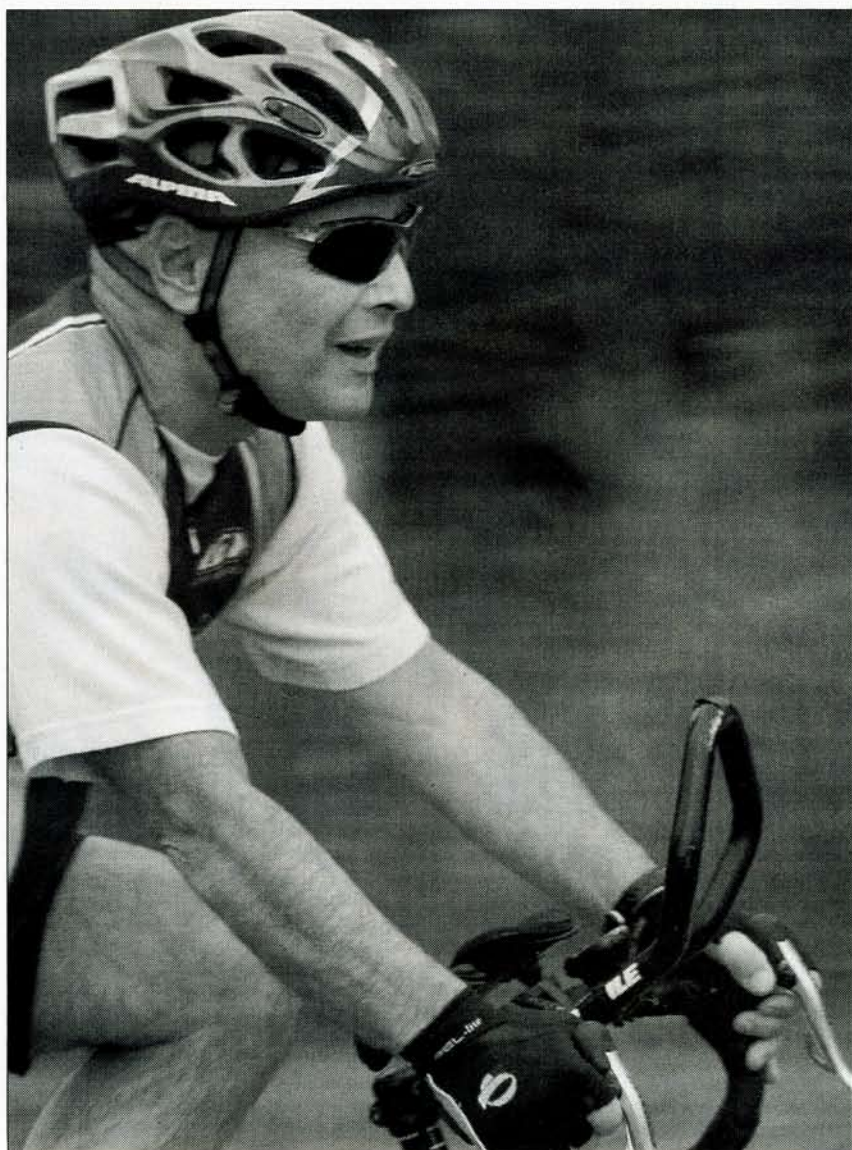
The regular guy doing unbelievable things

Nothing warms the heart better than a success story. You know the ones where the exercise adverse individual finally gets moving and not only manages to lose weight, but gain self-esteem and improve their health, to boot.

This year, Mandy Paquette shed extra weight she'd been struggling to lose. The West Island mother of three started taking a local boot camp class as well as becoming a regular at the yoga studio. The exercise combo worked.

Soon she was shedding inches and replenishing her wardrobe with clothes that fit her trimmed-down frame.

Anyone who has tried to lose weight that settled in



Sid Ingerman is a triathlete who participated in four competitions this year. He started running at 68 and will celebrate his 80th birthday in November.

long ago knows that taking off excess inches and keeping it off takes a huge commitment both in time and effort. Not only do you have to knuckle down and exercise regularly, you also have to revamp your eating and lifestyle habits not just in the short term, but for the rest of your life.

The irregular guy doing unbelievable things

This accolade goes out to all those exercisers who continue to get back up when life keeps knocking them down. An example of this type of hero happens to live with me.

After two hip surgeries that installed two new joints 18 months apart, my husband is once again lacing up his hockey skates.

Determined to get back in the A division of his old-timers league this fall, he regained lost fitness and built up strength in his legs working out all last hockey season

on the treadmill, stationary bike and stair climber. Then, just before the start of this year's season, he added some in-line skating in anticipation of his comeback.

He's playing hockey up to three times a week on hips that are more metal than flesh and bone. It just goes to show: Find an activity you love to do and it's never a chore getting it done.

The lifelong exerciser

These heroes are the men and women whose idea of retirement is to become a full-time athlete. Take Sid Ingerman: He started running at age 68, became a triathlete at 75 and just put his bike away after another successful season during which he completed in a handful of sprint triathlons (750-metre swim, 20K bike, 5K run). He turns 80 in November:

Not only is Sid a testament that fitness isn't exclusive to

the young, he's an example to all ages that you're never too old to get into shape.

The day-in and day-out guy

You all know this guy, the one you see out there running the streets on the coldest, hottest and wettest days of the year or hitting the gym at the same time every day for a workout that you can set your watch by.

What sets this guy apart is his dedication to a schedule.

Writing your workouts in your day timer, letting your colleagues know that meetings don't take precedence over exercise and surrounding yourself with a family that respects your sense of commitment to an active lifestyle are all strategies that make it easy to carve a chunk of time out of even the busiest day to work up a sweat.